



September 17, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

School is in full swing now, and the local fields are full of athletes of all sizes and ages. It also remains prime bicycling season. This week's letter will cover the "back to the future" new academic program at Nathan Bishop Middle School, the neighborhood meeting discussing the Olney Street bicycle lane, and a consultant's study concerning school building conditions in Rhode Island.

I attended the Nathan Bishop Parent Teacher Organization's opening meeting on Thursday night, and took in a promising report from Principal Kim Luca about the school's new academic program. This year, the school will host a City-wide advanced academic program which, similar to the program at Nathanael Greene, offers the opportunity to study a package of courses (English, mathematics, history and languages) at an advanced level. With the addition of teachers with this training, Principal Luca devised an "a la carte" advanced program for other students in the school, so that a student who would, for example, benefit from advanced mathematics but is not ready for advanced English, will have that option this year. The program is reminiscent of an earlier one the school had when it re-opened in 2009, but which changed when new leadership came into the School Department and the school. The new program may provide a unique opportunity at Bishop that will enrich the students' education and increase neighborhood enrollment.

On Wednesday night (Sept. 13) at Hope High School, the Planning Department presented information about the proposed bicycle lane on Olney Street. Some people in attendance offered suggestions/concerns about the specific layout, which hopefully will improve the operation of the bike lane once it opens. Others discussed the broader issue of bicycling in Providence, such as the need to develop a network that will allow bicyclists to navigate the entire City, the needs of Providence public school students to cross neighborhoods to get to school, and the concerns of those who commute to work in Providence. I am convinced the new lane will provide many benefits, and there is no need for a separate traffic study or economic impact study to realize them. On that note, on Friday, the Mayor sent a [Letter](#) to the City Council announcing his veto of a resolution proposing mandatory studies of traffic and economic impacts prior to the opening of any new bicycle lane. Proponents of the resolution focused on a single street (Broad Street), suggesting the issue arose out of that single experience. Because Broad Street's planning is still in its early stages, there appears an opportunity for the administration to work more closely with the local businesses and representatives without the need for a mandate that would harm bicycling across the rest of the City. I think it would be best for the City Council not to vote to override, but instead to try to work collaboratively with the administration on a project-specific basis.

On Wednesday, the Governor released a consultant's report estimating the cost of repairing all the school buildings across the State. The estimate for Providence was \$372 million, part of a Statewide estimate of \$2.2 billion. Under the State's school construction aid formula, the State would pay 83% of the City's cost, or \$309 million. (The State's share of these costs varies according the financial resources of the host district, from a minimum of 30% for charter schools to 100% for Central Falls.) I applied the formula to the report's estimate on a district-by-district basis in this [Chart](#), the total cost to the State of providing its share of renovation expense would be \$1.2 billion. The report also provides a 5-year budget for addressing the deficiencies and maintaining them, reaching a total of over \$3.2 billion over that time, of which more than \$1.7 billion would come from the State. Given the projects of a current-year deficit of more than \$200 million this year, and the prospect of a budgetary impact of more than \$200 million annually with the full implementation of car tax relief, it does not appear likely these needs will be addressed under the current framework. The Governor announced the formation of a working group to recommend changes to find enough resources to complete this important work. While I anticipate many or most of them will involve ways to reduce the State's contribution to this effort, I believe we need to have a discussion about whether school building construction should be treated as a higher priority; for example, it is not clear that car tax relief should be a higher priority than school building construction.

Sincerely,